

Tendencies in Modern Education

by Mary Antoinette Rice

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Modern education and educational methods take their rise from that movement called the revival of learning. No precise date can be given. It extended over a period of hundreds of years, during which, as in all great changes, there were periods of ebb and flow, of advances followed by reactions and decline. Between the destruction of the Roman and pre-Roman education and the modern school there is a long period in which one fades away with the destruction of the political fabric under which it lived and the modern system slowly takes its rise under the new conditions of society that grew up during the middle ages.

The period in which the want of learning in Europe is perhaps, the most conspicuous is that time beginning with the conquests of Mohammed till the eleventh and twelfth centuries. From the destruction of the Roman empire till perhaps not much more than five hundred years ago Europe had really no system of general education and no widespread or popular interest in schools.

Those parts of Europe and Africa which were overrun by Mohammed and his followers in their earlier conquests, were the seats of the most important schools and the abode of the greatest number of men of learning then in existence.

At Alexandria in Egypt had been gathered together the remains of ancient learning, and there in the schools were educated many of the scholars and great men that lived during the time that Alexandria continued to be the centre of educational impulse and attraction for this world.

Under the supremacy of Mohammedanism learning seems to have flourished in isolated places until under favorable conditions it extended itself to the more benighted parts of Europe. Hence, it is claimed by some authors that the dark ages of Europe were a period of great mental activity among the Arabs and, ^{if} that be so we are at least indebted to them for keeping alive an interest in science and the pursuit of learning till the rest of Europe could profit by their example. But no one claims that among the Arabs education or the knowledge of letters was widely prevalent or popular, only that study and intellectual pursuits were kept alive there while Christian Europe was almost wholly barbaric and unlettered.

Charlemagne, who died in 814, amid all his great cares made strenuous efforts for the improvement of his own mind, and one of his greatest claims to remembrance is the fact that he stimulated the culture of letters in every

way in his power. He was preeminently a patron of learning. Lewis in his history of Germany says that he founded schools in all the counties and visited them in person, encouraging the diligent pupils and reproofing the negligent, while he required that ~~sermons~~ should be preached in the language of the people. Even when an old man he found time, though often only at night, to practice in writing, his hand so accustomed to the sword. But even this estimate of his works is surpassed in detail by that given in a recent history of France.

"But perhaps the noblest monument of Charlemagne's genius is the revival of letters and extensive diffusion of knowledge which marked his reign, and which resulted mainly from his own enlightened and enthusiastic labors. Charlemagne was an indefatigable student; and the impulse of his personal example, patronage, and superintendence produced effects which considering the circumstances of the times, are truly wonderful, and redound to his eternal honor. History presents us with few more striking spectacles than that of the great monarch of the West, surrounded by the princes and princesses of his family and the chief personages of his brilliant court, all content to sit as learners at the feet of their Anglo-Saxon preceptor Alcuin in the

"school of ^{the} palace" at Aix-la-Chapelle. The course of study pursued by these august-academicians embraced the seven liberal arts, as they were called - the trivium and the quadrivium - with special attention to grammar, psalmody, and the theory of music; and since Alcuin excelled in the exposition of Scripture, we may be sure that the mysteries of theological science were not forgotten in his lectures. By a circular letter to the bishops in 781, the emperor required them to establish elementary schools in their cathedral cities for the gratuitous instruction of the children of freemen and of the laboring classes, while schools of a superior grade were to be opened at the same time in the larger monasteries, for the study of the higher branches of learning. A sufficient supply of teachers for these ~~schools~~ was not to be obtained in France, where literature had declined to the lowest point, and was almost extinct; the emperor therefore spared no exertion to attract to his court men of intelligence, ability, and learned acquirements from every part of Europe."

So much for the impulse given to education by one great ruler and if Charlemagne's successors had been his equals it is not probable that the Arabs would have received as much credit for help as is given them by some writers.

But the impulse that Charlemagne had given to education suffered from the weakness and incapacity of his successors, and if it was not wholly lost, there was a reaction and falling off from the great interest that he had created. The germs of educational effort after his day retired to convents and other sheltered places to gather strength and definiteness of plan for their more general triumph at a later day.

During all those ages in which the thought of general and liberal education was coming to the ~~surface~~^{surface} in Europe, it must be remembered that the people themselves were ignorant and powerless and what was done, was by virtue of the good-will, foresight, and patriotism of the great or those in power.

Accordingly, while we had the university at an early day we waited much longer for the general or common school system. The university received its character from the ideas dominant at its time of organization and imposed them upon the common schools, while the common school in like manner is beginning to reflect its ideas back upon the university and influencing it.

The oldest existing universities are Cambridge, England, founded in 1109, and Bologna Italy, 1119, but so rapid comparatively was the growth of modern education after it had

taken some organized form. that before the year 1500 there were in Europe 64 universities. About this time the agitation in favor of the general or common school began.

To the practice of the universities we must look for what education was then understood to mean. "The rise of the scholastic philosophy, the institution of universities and the return to the profound study of the Greek and Latin classics were the literary steps" that characterized that movement called the revival of learning. From the eleventh century till the fourteenth is, perhaps, the time in which the study of the classics secured their stronghold in popular favor.

And it is not strange from what we can learn of the superstitions and crude literature of the dark ages that Greek and Latin in the works of the ancient authors, as soon as they began to be known, grew in estimation and favor. These were the products of a comparatively enlightened age and fine scholarship. They are so perfect in contrast with what they supplanted that it is not strange they came to be looked upon as the indispensable means of a liberal education. And not only indispensable but they constituted for a long time the great bulk of what was learned. There was one incidental advantage, however, in the study of Greek and

Latin and, especially, of Greek; it furnished Europe with something like a common language when it had no other, but, on the other hand, as learning was chiefly contained in a dead language it did not reach the mass of the people. All these conditions if there were no others would serve to explain the tenaciously held that the study of Latin and Greek ^{has} had upon the schools.

Notwithstanding the vast superiority of Greek and Latin thought and expression over every thing else in the past, we have the right to inquire whether that superiority over other exponents for mental discipline and training, was inherent and real, or only relative and apparent. This question it has taken centuries to uncover and it will require perhaps a long time yet to answer and dispose of it conclusively.

In the first place, we can see that it was natural almost inevitable in the first revival of learning that the mind would turn to the depositary of the best results of learning as the starting point. As a result Greek and Latin thought and science so far as known, was received and learned with a love and appreciation and surrender, too, of all contemporaneous interests that was peculiar and remarkable.

But, after all, there is an essential

difference between mere copying and the production of literature; between the appreciative scholar and the creative one; and if we look a little into the merits of this question we may be able to see whether Greek and Latin can be expected always to hold their prominence over every other method as a means of mental training and discipline.

On the removal of learning we have seen that Greek and Latin classics were learned and conned and made a sort of ne plus ultra in a liberal education; but if we look to the ~~countries~~ that produced them, we find that they were the result, and not the means of an education there, I think if we look carefully we shall see that the Greek system of school training had ~~more~~ in common with the anti-classical methods of to-day than anything we have had from that remote past till the present time. They went right to nature and to their own tongue for their material with which to feed and discipline the mind. They produced Classics but never borrowed those from other nations and held them superior to their own. Even when the seat of Greek learning was arbitrarily removed to Alexandria, there was no rage in favor of the study of ancient Persian, Hindoo, or any other foreign language. The Greek

schools from what we can learn were a little miscellaneous in their character, held out of doors often and their geometrical problems traced in the sand, lacking the conveniences that we have to-day; yet the thoughts they picked up by the study ^{and observation of nature and the study} of personal character were real, ^{and original.} ~~elaborated~~ ^{These thoughts were} and vigorously ^{expressed} in a way that has challenged the admiration and held captive the human mind in a sense from that time till now.

But if it seems to me their peculiar excellence arose from the way they did their work, that is by concentrating their attention upon themselves and the things around them and not upon the literary page borrowed from some other nation and age, then the best-lesson of classical learning the world has heretofore missed, for classical learning as Europe has long known it, is mere copying and copying and the abrogation of Greek methods.

Then we can understand ^{too} that in the fullness of time this so-called attack upon classical education would arise. This modern revolt against so much Greek and Latin in our schools to the necessary exclusion of so much else, is it not one way of ~~reversing~~ ^{reversing} having sat so long at the feet of the Greeks we propose to arise and stand by their side. Having at last discovered something lacking in our system, the

world may catch the soul of their success and become their real imitators at last.

Agassiz' ~~summer~~^{kind} school in Penikese island was something of this; there the students were sent forth to find fishes or slugs or anything they could pick up and examine. It would have been much more convenient to look over the dried and preserved specimens on the shelves of his Cambridge museum, as we study the embalmed thought of the Greeks and Latins. But in the one case Agassiz knew there was something vital in his success that the students would miss, so in the other we know the full powers of the man are not often brought out by classical ~~study~~^{or} that kind of knowledge that comes through the study of books alone.

As by slow degrees a greater number of the people come into the possession of a little culture and intelligence, the practical helplessness of mere scholarship in many cases has led more and more to a popular distrust in the worth of their attainments. Our great achievements in invention, oratory or literature have often been done by persons deprived of all opportunities for a liberal education, showing conclusively that practical affairs are a great power in mental training and discipline. While they would not serve all aptitudes equally well, the same may be said of

Greek and Latin. Take those who have no aptitude for that kind of work, and the study of Greek and Latin makes them duller and more dull as common observation shows, and education limited to that kind of drill becomes at once a hopeless failure.

And so though ~~classical~~ training has become entrenched behind hundreds of years of organized support and its advocates still maintain that it must ever continue to hold the superiority over every other method, it is quite as obvious to others that it must give place to more varied and utilitarian methods.

The use of the common school and consequently the more general education of the masses has done more for such a result than all other causes. For with its general diffusion, education must become more and more a matter of utility and less a mere accomplishment.

Along this line of progress, we have the establishment in the complete and complicated system of German schools, of the Real Schule, as a rival to the Gymnasium. However much they may be declared inferior to the Gymnasium, their real meaning is to supply a defect in the Gymnasium itself. Just what that defect is may not be so well known as the fact of its existence, but the popular instinct is searching for it.

Whatever else may be predicated as to its content, the popular wish is to combine the worker or artisan with the scholar. General or popular education means that the three, learned professions shall not enjoy a monopoly ^{as heretofore} of scholarship, but that learning if it is to be general must go into all ranks and conditions, and even avocations of society and to make this practicable is the problem before us.

This problem is in about the same indeterminate condition with us that common school education was in the early days of the Reformation. Although the latter one is firmly established in popular estimation, the other is yet feeling its way towards recognition and organization.

About one hundred years ago with Pestalozzi, the germ of this new education was brought to light. That great reformer, and he is now conceded that honor, then began his experiments and the elucidation and expression of his principles. Like many a great general who may lose more battles than he gains and yet succeed, Pestalozzi's career had more of practical failure than of success, and yet he succeeded. He perceived that education as it was instituted was at fault with nature, and the search for something more in accordance with the laws of human life was what he was looking for. If he did not wholly succeed

the world is still carrying on that search. His foundation principle that education should proceed according to the laws of nature, has led, as it has made its way among ^{educators, to a great diversity in} curriculums in the universities to specialties, more science and experiment and relatively less of pure literary study.

In 1826 Froebel began to put forth his views and in 1837 he founded his first kindergarten school in Thuringia, Germany. It might be called a system of relief for the small children, and though following after the principles of Pestalozzi, it is perhaps, after all, an extreme application of them. It proposes to make study as pleasant as play, but whether the kindergarten with its expensive triviality of detail can ever survive except in its intention of making study natural and pleasant for children, is a question yet to be decided. It looks now to be merely an episode, and not a necessary part of the great change in the modern school, and to which Pestalozzi himself gave such a great impetus.

If the people are all to be educated the vast majority must be manual workers as well. No class can be depended upon for what is called menial labor, to the exclusion of the scholar. Since we have now as an outgrowth of the common school another demand, that of manual along with mental

training. We have as a result - another change in educational methods rapidly going forward. We have manual training schools, Mechanical and Agricultural Colleges, or departments, in universities, all helping to swell the general cry for manual and industrial education. Of course it must take years if not generations for this movement to take definite shape and give satisfactory results. But the material world has to be handled and handled by trained fingers and disciplined minds and the new education must provide for this work.

What little experiments we have had tend to show that the acquirements of the mind will proceed ^{at} about as rapid a rate when combined with manual training for half the time as if the whole attention be given to mental study; with the vast advantages of their added skill. It is natural for the child to run his thoughts off at the finger ends, and the disposition to work out and apply what the mind sees and apprehends, makes possible all art and all industrial progress. This aptitude is strong in the child and in the young man and grows weaker with the passing years and as the period for higher and more abstract thought comes on. Therefore, more often than otherwise, half the scholar has been idle and useless. His hands might as well have been tied behind him, for all the use he had for them, for

the learning he was after was all before him in his books and without them he was nothing. He often sat apart from his fellow beings looking as though he belonged to another world as indeed he should for he was helpless in this.

But the education we are looking for to-day is one that will train mind and hand together and give a place for the united exercise of hand and brain in all the varied affairs of this world. Of this at last shall be done, what more shall we have accomplished, after all, than a return in a more complete, extensive and complicated way, to the old habits of the ancient Greeks, when they studied ~~in~~ their own language, wrought out their own problems by the combined use of experiment and thought, and did so well that their works of both hand and brain have remained to this day the most perfect of their kind in all the wide expanse of human experience.



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